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Worth the Energy

It takes a lot of energy to tend to our large church family.

Mennonite World Conference (MWC) met in Harrisburg, PA this summer. That global gathering followed closely behind the Mennonite Church USA Convention in Kansas City, MO. The work of the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process and the Future Directions Task Force (FDTF) have continued through the summer as well. The conversations have been rich, the dialogue engaging. But it has taken a lot of energy.

It has been tempting to focus the summer entirely on myself. The heat waves beckoned me to the beach. Gentle breezes begged me to fish along rivers and lakes. Growing gardens and lawns welcomed my tending. Of course I was able to participate in all these activities. A summer fully consumed by pleasure may increase my sense of relaxation, but it can also leave me feeling empty and alone.

I could have focused the summer entirely on my family and close friends. Relationships closest to you need attention and are often overlooked. Sunsets offered front row seats on the back deck. Quiet afternoons offered relaxed conversation along shady forest trails. Balmy temperatures provided concentrated times of vacation. Of course I also participated in these events as well. A full summer restricted to those closest to you may greatly enhance these relationships, but it can also insulate them from other important influences. Even good friendships and families can become self serving.

Our culture seems drawn away from larger associations. Attention to the individual is priority. But individual fulfillment requires community. Healthy relationships with friends and family also seek ways to benefit others together.

Our families of faith are facing the pressures of the focus on individuals. But our church families have much to offer. When gathering with people from across Canada or around the world, you are reminded that you are part of something much bigger than yourself. Hearing how God is at work across the country and the world strengthens your faith. It reinforces the sense that God is at work.

Hearing matters of faith processed from within a different context enriches your own understandings of faith and theology. Different contexts provide new illustrations that can frame the familiar with fresh perspectives.

Staying contained within your own experience and relationships can create limited insight. A broader family of faith can see into your context and see things that you may have become blinded to. A broader family of faith can ask the simple and innocent questions that generate profound reconsideration and review.

There are many benefits to investing energy in the broader family of faith. To remain healthy individuals need to care for themselves, their families, friends and broader relationships. For congregations to remain healthy they too need to pay attention to themselves and to the broader family of faith.

All of these relationships are worth the energy.

This article originally appeared on Willard's blog. For more articles by Willard, visit: willardmetzger.blogspot.ca